

Low graduation rates? Oust teams from tournament

Early this basketball season, when the National Collegiate Athletic Association released its 2009 Division 1 Graduation



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Success
Rate report,
interim
president
Jim Isch
boasted how
the overall
graduation

rate for basketball was up nearly 10 percentage points over the last eight years.

"Be assured, the NCAA's commitment to academics is as strong as it has ever been," Isch said. Walter Harrison, president of the University of Hartford and chairman of the NCAA's academic performance committee, added, "At the ground level of academic reform on our campuses, there has been monumental change."

There is no assurance of monumental change until the NCAA finally grounds its worst programs. However, there is no sign of that as top-power Kentucky made the Division 1 tournament with a Graduation Success Rate of only 18 percent for its black athletes and 31 percent overall.

This program single-handedly betrays the NCAA as toothless on the exploitation of athletes.

Kentucky's graduation rate scorecard for its black players for the last six years reads like this: 18, 17, 9, 17, 17, zero. Over the last 10 years, its black player graduation rate has never risen above 29 percent. Its overall graduation rate passed 50 percent only once, in 2001.

Yet, who do we see hawking March Madness on Direct TV? Why none other than Kentucky's \$32 million coach, John Calipari. He remains one of the faces of college basketball despite Final Four appearances at UMass and Memphis that were struck from the record books for violations that damaged the reputations of the schools and its players, but somehow, not him.

This is particularly outrageous as the NCAA no longer penalizes schools in graduation-rate reports for players who leave early for the pros, as long as they were in good academic standing. Between that statistical adjustment and the schools that on their own elevated their game in the classroom, renegade programs are more exposed than ever.

The NCAA says 56 percent of black basketball players now graduate from Division 1 teams, continuing a slow increase. White

players have an 81 percent graduation rate.

There is plenty of praise to go around among the 65 teams that made this year's tournament. Top-tier seeds Kansas, Duke, Villanova, Pittsburgh and Georgetown have black player graduation rates between 67 and 100 percent.

Marquette, Wofford, Brigham Young, Wake Forest, Utah State and Notre Dame had a 100 percent graduation rate across the board.

But until the NCAA bans the likes of Maryland, Texas, Nevada Las Vegas and Kentucky, the concept of "student-athlete" is corrupted beyond repair. At these schools, the athletes are semipros who should be paid.

Maryland is in the tournament with a zero black graduation rate and 8 percent overall. It has been at zero for black men the last three seasons. Over the rest of the last decade, it has been at 11 percent four times and never cracked 25 percent.

Texas is in the tournament with black graduation rates the last three seasons of 29, 14 and 22 percent. Nevada Las Vegas is in the tournament with five consecutive years of black player grad rates of: 13, 10, 10, 14, and 17 percent.

And then there is the maddening University of California at Berkeley. The campus graduation rate is 85 percent, including 62 percent for black students. But the graduation success rate for both its black and white players is zero.

There is a huge gap between those teams and the teams that take graduation seriously. Of the 65 teams, there were 24 with black graduation rates of 67 percent or higher. But there were also 28 teams with black graduation rates of 44 percent or lower. Other teams under 30 percent for black players were New Mexico State, Washington, Missouri, Arkansas-Pine Bluff and Baylor.

In his commercial, Calipari says, "To survive in the big dance, you can't study just one team at a time. You've got to be ready for anything. I prepare my team with NCAA Mega March Madness."

Until the NCAA demands studies of another sort and starts banning the programs that do not heed the demand, March Madness will remain a national indictment of how we let college sports drive us stark raving mad.

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